

Date of Hearing: February 3, 2026

Julie Robin Solomon

Baltimore, MD 21231

TESTIMONY ON SB#323 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Full Bill Name: Juvenile Court--Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Julie Robin Solomon

My name is Julie Robin Solomon. I am a resident of District 46. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#323--Juvenile Court--Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

I am a psychiatric nurse practitioner who treats adolescents with mental health conditions and adjustment disorders. A member of the American Association of Nurses (ANA) and the American Association of Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners, I have worked in pediatric hospital settings, adolescent residential treatment programs, clinics, and private practice over the last 15 years. In these settings, I have learned that treating teenagers requires hard-earned specialized knowledge and specific skills. But the chief axiom we must always bear in mind in treating adolescents is simple: the teenage brain is biologically immature. The pre-frontal cortices are not fully formed until the mid-twenties; the limbic system--the emotional center--tends to dominate leading to impulsiveness; and the brain's axons are not fully myelinated, resulting in slower operations. Taken together these features of the adolescent brain make it less capable of making morally sophisticated and future-oriented decisions. That is why we don't treat those under the age of eighteen the same as adults in the medical field, the educational field, or in the civic arena. We don't medicate them the same, we don't educate them the same, and we don't afford them the same legal rights, privileges, and responsibilities as adults.

In my own psychiatric work, I have seen psychological and moral injury done to teenagers whose parents have neglected to guide them appropriately, parents who have saddled their teenagers with responsibilities that the parents themselves should have handled, whether that be taking care of younger children, financially supporting the family, or holding the family together emotionally. The state similarly injures adolescents whenever it by default treats them as adults in the court system. This deprives them of protections and educational services that are mostly likely to lead to rehabilitation and the attainment of a happy and productive life. Our current law makes it more likely they will remain mired in the criminal world. Our role as adults and political leaders is to all we can to help them to escape from it.

In sum, I support HB #323 because it is morally and legally wrong to try juveniles as adults; moreover it flies in the face of what we know about developmental neurology. From a moral perspective, automatically treating adolescents as adults is a moral dereliction of our adult responsibility to protect children as children. From a legal perspective, automatic charging in the court setting substitutes a blunt instrument for the expertise of judges and prosecutors most familiar with proceedings against juveniles. From a neurological perspective our current law flouts science. Thank you for your hard work and I hope you will support this important bill.